The strange Hebrew of a blessing for the Prophets: T-S K6.113

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Biblical verses used in medieval texts of various genres often exhibit spellings different from those of the Masoretic text. The majority of these deviations are relatively minor and involve the plene spelling of vowels that are written defectively in the biblical text. Recently, I came across a curious text consisting of three biblical verses written with drastic deviations from the standard biblical spelling. The text, preserved in T-S K6.113, fol. 2v, contains a blessing for the reading of the haftarah. It is entitled "the blessing for the Prophets" and made up of Hosea 12:11, Amos 3:7, Isaiah 59:21. The text is written in a careful hand that makes the impression of being not very experienced in writing Hebrew. Below I present the text as it is found in the fragment, juxtaposing it with the same verses in the MT.

MT	T-S K6.113, fol. 2v	
	ברכת אל[נפ]יים	1.
וְדִבַּרְתִּי עַל־הַנְּבִיאִים וְאָנֹכִי	ודבארתי על הנפיים ואנוכי	2.
חָזוֹן הִרְבֵּיתִי וּבְיַד הַנְּבִיאִים	חאזון הרבאתי ופיאד הנפיים	3.
אֲדַמֶּה[2] כִּי לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה	אתהמא כי לו יאעסא : ǀ אלוהים	4.
דָּבָר כִּי אִם־	דאפאר כי לו יאעסא[1] כיאם	5.
גָּלָה סוֹדוֹ אֶל־עֲבָדָיו הַנְּבִיאִים[3]	ב(גאלו)(?) סודא על עואד[א]ב הנבים	6.
וַאֲנִי זֹאת בְּרִיתִי אוֹתָם אָמַר	ואני זות ס?ברית אותם אמאר	7.
יְהוָה רוּחִי אֲשֶׁר עָלֶיךָ וּדְבָרַי	ייי רוחי אשאר עלכא ודפאראי	8.
אֲשֶׁר־שַׂמְתִּי בְּפִיךָ לֹא־יָמוּשׁוּ	אשא[ר] [א]סאמתי בפיכא לו יאמושו	9.
מִפִּיךָ וּמִפִּי זַרְעֲךָ וּמִפִּי זֶרַע	מפיכא ומפי זרעך ומפי זארע	10.
זַרְעֲךָ אָמַר יְהוָה	זרעך ומפי זארע זרעך אמר ייי	11.
	[רוח]י אשאר עלכא ... הנפיים	12.
מֵעַתָּה וְעַד־עוֹלָם[4]	והו? מאעת ועד עלם	13.

A number of non-standard spelling features are conspicuous in the fragment:

1. Long qamaṣ, pataḥ, seghol and ṣere are in most cases represented by the mater lectionis aleph: הרבאתי for חָזוֹן (l. 3), ודבארתי for וְדִבַּרְתִּי (l. 2), אשאר for אֲשֶׁר (l. 8), חאזון for

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1. Text that is underlined in the edition is framed in the manuscript, marking it for deletion.
2. Hosea 12:11
3. Amos 3:7
4. Isaiah 59:21

הַרְבֵּיתִי (l. 3). Ḥolam is also occasionally represented by aleph, e.g. סודא for סׄודׄו (l. 6) but it is more commonly represented by waw. Short vowels are not represented by matres lectionis.

2. Quiescent aleph is not represented: לו for לֹא (l. 4), זות for זֹאת (l. 7).

3. Fricative bet is commonly represented by peh: הנפיים for הַנְּבִיאִים (l. 2), דאפאר for דְבָר (l. 5). Fricative bet is once represented by waw: עואדֿב for עֲבָדָיו (l. 6). In the same word consonantal waw is represented by bet.

4. Sin is represented by samekh: יאעסא for יַעֲשֶׂה (l. 4), סאמתי for שַׂמְתִּי (l. 9).

5. Plosive gimel is originally represented by kaph, which is crossed out and a gimel is added on top: בַּיׄאלו? for גָּלָה (l. 6)

6. Fricative dalet is once written with tav and heh: אתהמא for אֲדָמֶה (l. 4), possibly to indicate aspiration.

Weird as it may appear upon first glance, this spelling is not random. In fact, features 1–5 are regularly attested in Karaite and Muslim transcriptions of Biblical Hebrew into Arabic script. In the 10th and 11th centuries Karaite scholars in Palestine transcribed biblical texts into Arabic script. The purpose of these transcriptions was to preserve the reading tradition of the Bible as opposed to its consonantal text. It appears that our fragment is a re-transcription of the blessing from the Arabic into the Hebrew script. It may have been penned by someone preparing to publicly read the haftarah.

That the text is copied from a Vorlage rather than from memory is shown by scribal errors of dittography: the passages marked for deletion in lines 5 and 11–12 are repetitions of text written on the previous line caused by the writer's eye jumping up, e.g. from the second to the first כִּי in Amos 3:7.

The Karaite connection of the text is indicated by the rest of the bi-folio, although it is copied in a different, more skilled hand than "the blessing for the Prophets". T-S K6.113, fols 1v–2r contain a florilegium of biblical verses on the themes of study, the Torah and the commandments, including Isaiah 50:4, Psalms 119:18, Deuteronomy 6:25 and Psalms 147:2, etc. This florilegium is contrasted in the fragment with the Rabbanite "blessing for the Torah", בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יייָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים וְנָתַן לָנוּ אֶת תּוֹרָתוֹ. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יייָ נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה, suggesting that the florilegium itself is Karaite.

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